Field Notes on the Naturalization and Denaturalization of Disability in (Feminist) Philosophy: What They Do and How They Do It

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Abstract

In this article, I offer an account of how the individualized and medicalized conception of disability that prevails in philosophy is naturalized in bioethics, cognitive science, feminist philosophy, political philosophy, and other subfields of the discipline. By the end of the article, I will have both indicated how disabled people are constituted in philosophical discourse as a problem to be rectified or eliminated and explained how the prevalence in philosophy of this naturalized conception of disability contributes to and reinforces the exclusion of disabled philosophers from the profession of philosophy. Critical philosophical work on disability is an important means with which to resist and subvert this exclusion.

Social Inequality Naturalized

This article offers an account of the naturalization of disability in philosophy—that is, the naturalization of the individualized and medicalized conception of disability that prevails in philosophy. By the end of the article, I will have indicated how disabled people are constituted in philosophical discourse as a problem to be rectified, if not eliminated, and furthermore, I will have explained how the prevalence in philosophy of this individualized and medicalized conception of disability contributes to and reinforces the dire exclusion of disabled philosophers from the profession of philosophy. The article thus comprises an argument for the importance of critical philosophical work on disability as a means with which to resist and subvert this exclusion.

Most of my writing, teaching, service, and activism in philosophy has been designed to undermine a cluster of assumptions about the relation between nature and nurture, especially with respect to disability—that is, a cluster of assumptions about the relation between biology and society that remain embedded in philosophical discourses, naturalizing and re-biologizing disability (as well as gender, race, sexuality, and other apparatuses of power). I contend that the naturalization of

these assumptions about disability in (for example) bioethics, ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of mind is a form of structural gaslighting. Nora Berenstain (forthcoming) defines structural gaslighting as "any conceptual work that functions to obscure the nonaccidental connections between structures of oppression and the patterns of harm that they produce and license." People engage in structural gaslighting, Berenstain asserts, when they invoke epistemologies and ideologies of domination that actively and routinely disappear and obscure the actual causes, mechanisms, strategies, and effects of oppression (Berenstain, forthcoming; Dotson 2012). My argument is that the epistemologies and ontologies of domination[1] that persistently naturalize disability in philosophy continually sabotage attempts to improve the situation and status of disabled philosophers within professional philosophy, in part because they variously facilitate the reconstitution within both the discipline and profession of deeply entrenched extant beliefs according to which disabled people are defective, unreliable, and suboptimal, and thus not viable colleagues.

African American feminist sociologist and legal scholar Dorothy Roberts (2016; also 1998, 2012) has argued—especially with respect to the social, economic, political, and scientific constitution of race—that there is no natural human body; that genes do not determine anything; and that our brains are plastic, modifiable with social experience. As Roberts has remarked, human biology is not an entity distinct from the environment, interacting with and relating to it; rather, human biology is constituted by and through this vast array of social relations and interactions. Given that biology, the body, human nature, and even materiality itself are the products of these innumerable social relations and interactions, critical analyses of race, disability, gender, and other subjectifying inequalities must, therefore, consider how claims that naturalize these ostensibly "biological" phenomena emerge, in what contexts these claims are mobilized and advanced, and for what social, economic, and political purposes. Although arguments about the naturalization of disability (as well as race, gender, and sexuality, among other subjectifying categories) in philosophy may seem most pertinent to philosophers of disability, feminist philosophers, and other practitioners of (so-called) applied and social philosophy, the ways in which disability is naturalized in philosophy and what can be done to *de*-naturalize disability in philosophy and elsewhere ought to be of interest and concern to every philosopher.

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[1] In my *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (Tremain 2017), I introduced the term *epistemology of domination,* recommending that the term be used to replace the term *epistemology of ignorance*. The former term, I argued, does the conceptual work that the latter term was designed to do yet avoids the ableist and classist implications of the latter term.

Many philosophers might question why the naturalization and denaturalization of disability in philosophy ought to interest and concern the philosophical community at large. Why, they might ask, should philosophers, in general, be particularly concerned about philosophical questions and issues that revolve around disability? Aren't these questions and issues best addressed in the subfield of bioethics and cognate areas of inquiry? In other words, many (perhaps most) philosophers might ask why philosophers, in general, should be concerned about questions and issues that arise in a specific area of applied ethics. Some philosophers might also wonder why they should understand disability in social and political terms rather than medical or administrative terms.

In my discussion that follows, I will respond to these sorts of questions and the assumptions on which they rely by considering (1) what disability is and its relation to power; (2) what sorts of knowledges about disability philosophers (including feminist philosophers) currently produce; (3) how the philosophical study of disability should be categorized; and (4) what categorization and classification in philosophy actually do. The responses that I will offer thus address the metaphysical and epistemological status of disability, the political origins of disability, and the value-laden and performative character of categorization and classification in philosophy.

In order to provide a context for the ensuing claims about the naturalization of disability in philosophy, let me note what a growing body of work has amply demonstrated—namely, that philosophy is widely recognized as the most conservative and homogeneous discipline across the humanities and social sciences with respect to areas of inquiry and specialization. As South African philosopher Leonhard Praeg (2019) puts it, "Of the disciplines in the humanities, philosophy is often regarded as most resistant to change, transformation, and decolonization." Although mainstream philosophy prides itself on its adherence to the putative ideals of neutrality, universality, and objectivity, the institutionally entrenched structure of the discipline ensures that certain ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies will be reproduced as genuine philosophy and other ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies will continue to be cast as mere derivatives of the former allegedly fundamental ways of knowing and doing philosophy, rendering these supposed derivatives of the bona fide philosophy as more or less expendable.

Furthermore, the homogeneity of the topics and questions studied in philosophy is co-constitutive with and reinforces the homogeneity of the demographics of philosophy; that is, philosophy is also the most demographically homogeneous discipline in the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, the profession of philosophy is populated almost exclusively by nondisabled white people. Disabled philosophers make up about 1 percent of full-time philosophy faculty in Canada and only marginally more in the United States, although, by most

credible estimates, disabled people constitute about 25 percent of the general population of North America (Tremain 2013b, 2017). Black philosophers make up about 1 percent of full-time philosophy faculty in the United States, although African Americans constitute approximately 14 percent of the US population. At present, there are only six Black philosophers employed as full-time philosophy faculty in the United Kingdom—the entire United Kingdom (Curry and Tremain 2019). At present, furthermore, there is not a single disabled philosopher of disability employed full-time in a Canadian philosophy department. Indeed, disabled philosophers of disability who earned a PhD in philosophy in Canada have been compelled to take employment in the United States; have left philosophy, taking employment in another discipline; have left academia altogether; are drastically underemployed; or are viciously unemployed.[2] My writing and teaching on the naturalization of disability in philosophy and my service and activism with respect to the exclusion of disabled philosophers from philosophy have been largely designed to rectify this terrible state of affairs.

Mechanisms of Naturalization

Across the various subfields of philosophy, disability is naturalized as a nonaccidental and disadvantageous biological human characteristic, attribute, difference, or property that ought to be corrected or eliminated—as vividly demonstrated by the ongoing production of doctrines in bioethics that promote selective abortion, genetic technologies, and euthanasia; arguments in ethics and political philosophy about ways to compensate disabled people for their natural disadvantages; and claims about autism and theory of mind in cognitive science (Tremain 1996, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2019; Hall 2016; Yergeau and Huebner 2017). Hence the most vital philosophy of disability generated at present engages in a form of conceptual engineering—that is, aims to articulate an alternative conception of disability, a conception of disability that denaturalizes it, construing it as a historically contingent apparatus of power, one strategy of which is the exclusion of disabled people from the profession of philosophy and other positions of epistemic authority. As Foucault explained it, "The coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus [of knowledge-power that] marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false" (2008, 19). An apparatus is an ensemble of discourses, institutions, scientific statements, laws, administrative measures, and philosophical propositions that responds to an urgent need in a given historical moment (Foucault, 1980, 194). Normalization is the urgent requirement to which the apparatus of disability

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[2] My thanks to an anonymous referee whose comment about "leaving philosophy" prompted me to point out this egregious state of affairs.

responds, including the way that this apparatus operates in philosophy. Consider, for instance, the way in which feminist philosophers have implicitly and explicitly endorsed and elaborated notions of normality and abnormality in the context of their argumentative claims about Michel Foucault's supposed masculinist biases and sexism in his treatment of the nineteenth-century legal case and confinement of Charles Jouy (Tremain 2013a, 2017).

The subordinated status of disabled philosophers has not been widely acknowledged as a contingent effect of productive power relations but rather has been taken for granted as an outcome of allegedly natural human differences and subjective preferences, or in any case, attributed to factors external to the operations of power that circulate within and around the discipline and profession of philosophy. Other inequalities in philosophy are likewise naturalized and materialized. For example, gender disparities in the profession are often justified with appeals to explanations about allegedly natural differences between the brains of two binary sex-genders, where, coincidentally, these alleged differences render the topics and questions traditionally studied in philosophy more suitable to so-called male modes of thinking and thus more aptly appreciated by (cisgender) men. Against the tendency of philosophers to naturalize the inequalities of the profession in such a fashion, I aim to identify the ways in which the underrepresentation of disabled philosophers and the marginalization of philosophy of disability are integral to the current structure and practice of philosophy, drawing upon Foucault's insight that power is immanent to and constitutive of objects, relations, and differences rather than external to these phenomena, somehow acting upon them.

The resistance that I have encountered within philosophy to my research on the social constitution of disability and its naturalized foundation, impairment; to my conceptual engineering with respect to the apparatus of disability; to my critique of (feminist) bioethics; and to my activism in the service of disabled philosophers—that is, the resistance and indeed outright hostility from within philosophy to my research and writing on the constitution of the apparatus of disability and how it operates in philosophy, as well as to the activism that has often motivated the research and, at times, followed from it—has actually enabled me to identify and understand ways in which the phenomena of these seemingly distinct spheres are inextricably entwined, mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing (Tremain 2017; on the "costs" of such interventions, see also Dotson [2011, 2019]).

Due to the predominance in philosophy of an individualized and medicalized understanding of disability, philosophers generally do not regard disability as pertinent to emerging research in the subfield of social metaphysics, nor do they, generally speaking, appreciate the critical philosophical importance of the relatively recent subfield of philosophy of disability but rather remain resolute that disability is appropriately and adequately addressed in the established domains of medicine,

science, and bioethics. I want to point out, nevertheless, that the naturalizing and individualizing assumptions upon which this belief relies condition both the conceptual-analytical work in which philosophers engage and the judgements that they make about faculty searches and hiring practices, journal submissions, course content, curricula, graduate school applications, conference line-ups, the shape of edited collections, tenure and promotion, and so on. In other words, the prevalence in philosophy of the assumption that the recognizably "social" disadvantages that disabled people confront are the inevitable consequences of allegedly "natural" disadvantages has feedback effects for the subjectivities, aspirations, and careers of disabled philosophers; for the composition and character of the profession; and for the very practice and performance of philosophy, including what counts as philosophy, who produces it, why, and how; furthermore, this assumption conspires with other forms of inequality in philosophy, such as prestige bias and purportedly neutral determinations of merit (De Cruz 2018; Dotson 2013). My philosophical research has, therefore, been designed, in part, to show that the conception of disability that predominates in philosophy—a conception according to which disabled people are naturally, that is, inherently, flawed and thus defective—is causally related to the underrepresentation of disabled philosophers in the profession. My argument is that insofar as disabled people are systematically constituted in philosophical discourses as naturally flawed and defective, it is no surprise that disabled philosophers are not regarded as viable colleagues.

Let me underscore that the idea that disabled people are naturally flawed and thus defective is a pernicious artifact of historically contingent relations of power; hence, the exclusion of disabled people from philosophy that this idea fosters and through which the idea is reproduced must (it demands to be said) also be recognized as a contingent artifact of power, as a reversible circumstance of power.

PhilPapers—the influential open-access database of philosophical research— is an institutionalized mechanism that furthers an individualized and medicalized conception of disability in philosophy and contributes to the underrepresentation of disabled philosophers, especially disabled philosophers of disability. Indeed, the architectural framework and scaffolding of PhilPapers subordinate an array of areas of inquiry that underrepresented philosophers generate insofar as the content of the database is organized into predetermined and hierarchically arranged areas of specialization, subfields, and topics in accordance with dominant ideas in the tradition of Euro-American Western philosophy about which areas, subfields, and topics have the most philosophical import and explanatory power and should be endowed with the most authoritative status. The subfields of this tradition generally assumed to form its so-called core or fundamental areas of inquiry—"Metaphysics and Epistemology," "Value Theory," "Science, Logic, and Mathematics," "History of

Western Philosophy," and "Philosophical Traditions"—are designated as the supreme categories in the database, while other areas of inquiry are designated as subcategories of these supreme categories, or subcategories of the subcategories of the supreme categories, or even subcategories of the subcategories of the subcategories of the supreme categories, where a category's distance from the supreme categories is taken to implicitly announce its purportedly diminished philosophical import, explanatory power, and authoritative status (Tremain 2013b, 2017).

In the current formulation of the PhilPapers database, feminist philosophical work on disability has been placed under "Feminism: Disability," a subcategory of "Topics in Feminist Philosophy," which is a subcategory of the superior category of "Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality," itself a subcategory of the supreme category of "Value Theory." In the schema of the PhilPapers database, that is, feminist philosophy of disability is represented as on par with "topics" in feminist philosophy such as "Autonomy" and "Identity Politics" rather than represented as on par with and in relationship with other subjecting apparatuses in a more comprehensive superior category of "Philosophy of Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Disability." Although at present the superior category of "Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality" comprises subcategories of "Philosophy of Gender," "Philosophy of Race," and "Philosophy of Sexuality," it does not likewise encompass a subcategory of "Philosophy of Disability" (Tremain 2013b, 2017).

No objective and value-neutral explanation can be offered for why feminist philosophy of disability and feminist philosophy more generally have been thus categorized and subordinated in the PhilPapers database, nor can an objective and value-neutral explanation be provided for why philosophy of disability has been virtually excluded from the database; rather, the relegated status in the database of feminist philosophy in general and feminist of philosophy of disability more specifically, as well as the virtual omission of philosophy of disability from the database, are the consequences of value-laden and interested political decisions. Among other things, these decisions prevent the incorporation of disability into intersectional and other integrated feminist analyses, thereby reinforcing depoliticized conceptions of disability in philosophy and contributing to the marginalization of critical work on disability within the subfield of feminist philosophy and the discipline more generally. Indeed, the impetus for the relegated positioning of feminist and other critical philosophical work on disability in the PhilPapers database becomes clearer when one considers how disability is naturalized and medicalized elsewhere in the database.

The classification of subfields and specializations in philosophy and the questions and concerns that these subfields and specializations comprise is no mere value-neutral representation of objective differences, relations, and similarities that

await discovery and recognition. Rather, classification and classification systems in philosophy (and everywhere else) are *performative* and contribute to the constitution of the allegedly value-neutral yet very value-laden resemblances, distinctions, and relationships between phenomena and states of affairs that they put into place. Although the formula of PhilPapers represents philosophy as a detached, disinterested, and impartial enterprise, my critiques of the database have emphasized that political, social, cultural, and institutional relations of power influence every aspect of the discipline and profession of philosophy. My critiques of the database have emphasized, furthermore, that every philosophical question and concern, as well as every subfield and specialization that comprise these questions and concerns, is a politically potent artifact of historically contingent and culturally specific discourse. As historical artifacts of discourse, I submit, every question, concern, subfield, and specialization in philosophy can be traced genealogically (Tremain 2013a; 2017, ix–xi).

It would be difficult to overstate the constraining effects that the PhilPapers database generates for the development of critical philosophical work on disability. Nor would it be easy to overstate the deleterious consequences that accrue to disabled philosophers due to the structure of a spin-off of PhilPapers, namely, PhilJobs, the leading international philosophy job board whose architecture mirrors the architectural framework of PhilPapers. To make a long story short, the structure of PhilJobs, like the structure of PhilPapers, systematically precludes reference to philosophy of disability, discouraging the creation of job postings in philosophy of disability and preventing the specification of database searches for jobs in the area. Indeed, to date, no PhilJobs advertisement for a full-time philosophy job anywhere in the world has designated philosophy of disability as an area of specialization (AOS), despite the fact that research and teaching in philosophy of disability have been thus identified for more than a decade and even though philosophy of disability's primary allies—critical disability theory and disability studies—are burgeoning interdisciplinary fields of inquiry elsewhere across the university. Job postings in philosophy significantly influence what philosophers regard as current and emerging research in the discipline and as important areas of the field to build in their own departments. Hiring departments, insofar as they do not see other departments recruit and hire specialists in the subfield of philosophy of disability, are not motivated to recruit and hire specialists in philosophy of disability themselves. Given that many, if not most, specialists in philosophy of disability are disabled, the current classificatory scheme of PhilPapers and PhilJobs—in the terms of which disability is naturalized, individualized, and medicalized—ought therefore to be recognized as a technology of power that significantly contributes to the underrepresentation of disabled philosophers in the profession of philosophy.

Genealogy as a Philosophical Practice of Denaturalization

As examination of PhilPapers and PhilJobs indicates, analysis of the categories and classificatory schemes that philosophers produce to think, write, and teach about disability can enable the identification of ways in which the naturalization of disability in philosophy breeds epistemic, professional, institutional, and social inequalities. Genealogy is another effective philosophical practice with which to denaturalize and de-biologize institutional and other inequalities and the phenomena that contribute to their constitution. Genealogy can, for instance, reveal how certain guiding assumptions and premises of various areas and subfields of philosophy emerged and gained epistemic authority in philosophy, as well as how these assumptions and premises have been configured in ways that collude with professional interests and accepted practices to reinstate the naturalization and biologization of disability. The pathologization of Phineas Gage, which enabled the emergence and consolidation of the fields of (among others) cognitive science and neuroscience, is a case in point.

Gage was a railroad supervisor when, in 1848, he was impaled by a tamping iron that entered his left cheek and exited the back of his head. A genealogical study of the aftermath of Gage's injury can serve as a testament to the artifactual and productive character of the ableism constitutive of philosophical discourse on disability. For over the course of more than a century and a half, an almost mythical narrative has been elaborated within psychology and medical textbooks about the aftermath of Gage's injury, a mythology to which philosophers and cognitive scientists have subscribed and upon which they have steadily expanded. As Harvard neurologist Allan Ropper puts it, Gage's "famous case" helped to "establish brain science as a field." Says Ropper, "If you talk about hard core neurology and the relationship between structural damage to the brain and particular changes in behavior, this is ground zero." Ropper explains that Gage's brain injury offered scientists and medical practitioners "an ideal case" insofar as it involved one region of the brain, was very evident, and the resulting changes in personality were "stunning" (quoted in Hamilton 2017).

The contested status of assumptions about the modularity of the brain aside (for example, O'Donovan 2013), these sorts of claims about the impact of Gage's injury have enabled philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists to use the story of Gage as a springboard with which to launch arguments, develop experiments, and formulate positions on, among other things, personal identity, the true self, and the moral self (Strohminger 2014; Knobe 2016; Tobia 2016). My argument is, however, that the uses to which philosophers and cognitive scientists routinely put the story of Gage naturalize the phenomena of brain injury, simultaneously contributing to the significance attributed to brain injury and tendentiously isolating brain injury

from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which it is embedded and in which its significance is materialized.

In a provocative essay on Gage, Steve Twomey (2010) notes that "John Martyn Harlow, the doctor who treated Gage for a few months after the incident, reported that Gage's friends found him 'no longer Gage.'" To Harlow, Twomey remarks, "the balance between Gage's 'intellectual faculties and animal propensities' seemed [to have disappeared]. [Gage was unable to] stick to plans, uttered 'the grossest profanity' and showed 'little deference for his fellows.'" In *An Odd Kind of Fame: Stories of Phineas Gage*, Malcolm Macmillan (2002) points out that subsequent accounts of Gage's changed character have gone far beyond Harlow's dubious initial observations, transforming Gage into "an ill-tempered, shiftless drunk." My research on Gage has convinced me that these accounts about Gage's demeanour post-accident are exaggerated and in fact seem largely fabricated.

Consider, if you will, that Harlow—to whom most of the relevant medical, scientific, and philosophical literature appeals—treated and observed Gage for only a few months, a relatively short span of time given Gage's injury and the changes in his life that it would have entailed. Indeed, Harlow's description of the post-incident-Gage does not warrant the dispositional and personality changes—cruel, mean, abusive, violent, and so on—that have been attributed to Gage in the scientific, psychological, and philosophical literature over the years. I contend, therefore, that the ways that, if not the very fact that, cognitive scientists and philosophers use the story of Gage are highly contestable. Consider that even if the oft-cited reports from Gage's friends were in fact made, these reports may have been motivated and conditioned by their own misunderstandings about his behaviour, their own revulsion and prejudice about his changed physical appearance, or simply by their own impatience as he learned new ways to comport himself in the world. Some accounts of Gage's life after the incident contradict the oft-cited reports, indicating that Gage had a pleasant enough disposition post-injury but was socially outcast and unable to find employment, experiences that most disabled people in the present share. That Gage's situation has been exaggerated and embellished within the contexts of neuroscience, psychology, philosophy of mind, experimental philosophy, and medicine reminds us that science, philosophy, and medicine are embedded social practices rather than disinterested domains that exist apart from and unsullied by ableist biases and other elements of the apparatus of disability. In short, the uses to which philosophers have put the Gage case and their rationale and justifications for continuing to do so (for instance, Shoemaker and Tobia, forthcoming) are stark examples of how the social and political causes and effects of philosophical inquiry are persistently neutralized and naturalized—that is, how the situated and interested character of the contexts of discovery from

which philosophical questions and claims emerge are persistently covered over and presented as disembedded, disinterested, objective, and value neutral (Tremain 2015, 2017; Dotson 2013).

Foucault, in his work on the history of sexuality and the history of the modern prison, adapted the genealogical method that Friedrich Nietzsche introduced in his studies of the lineage of Western morals, with Foucault variously referring to his own incarnations of genealogy as "histories of the present" and "historical ontologies of ourselves." Of what is given to us as universal, necessary, and obligatory, Foucault asked, how much is occupied by the singular, the contingent, the product of arbitrary constraints? Foucault used genealogy to critically inquire into the history of necessity on a given topic and the historical emergence of the necessary conditions of a certain state of affairs, arguing that a critical ontology of ourselves must be conceived as a "limit-attitude," an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us; that is, genealogy identifies how historically contingent practices, events, and accidents have enabled the emergence of current modes of thinking and acting and the limits that they impose (Foucault 1982, 216–219). As Ladelle McWhorter (2010) explains it, genealogies help us to make sense of how we are now, that is, in this historical moment, inasmuch as they show how we got here and how this, here, now, is historically possible. In other words, genealogies denaturalize us, rendering us *un*-natural, naturalized, and artifactual.

Like Margrit Shildrick (2005), McWhorter (2009), Melinda Hall (2013, 2016), and other feminist philosophers of disability, I have drawn on insights that Foucault introduced in his genealogies of abnormality, perversion, madness, and other discursive objects generally associated with disability in order to identify the artifactual character of disability. The various genealogies that I have articulated with respect to impairment and disability are the outcomes of this work (for example, Tremain 2001, 2005, 2008, 2013a, 2015, 2017). In Foucault's genealogical studies of abnormality, madness, and sexuality, he was concerned with the "problematization" of phenomena; that is, Foucault was concerned to show how these phenomena became thinkable as problems in the first place, how they emerged as problems to which solutions came to be sought. In an explanation of this work that has not yet been suitably acknowledged, Foucault stated that a "conditional imperative" (2007, 3) underpins each of these genealogical inquiries, for he recognized that every theoretical or analytical discourse is in some way reliant upon or permeated by something like an imperative discourse. Foucault characterized the imperatives that underpin these restrained inquiries in this way: "If you want to struggle, here are some key points, here are some lines of force, here are some constrictions and blockages" (3). In other words, Foucault maintained

that the conditional imperatives on which his work relied were "no more than tactical pointers" to "tactically effective analysis" in "the circle of struggle and truth, that is to say, precisely, philosophical practice" (3). The conditional imperatives (or imperative discourses) that support Foucault's analyses are contingent strategies to understand given phenomena in particular ways and to make them understood as such.[3] My genealogical and other feminist analyses of impairment and the apparatus of disability should be characterized in this way; that is, my feminist philosophical analyses of the apparatus of disability should be understood strategically, as conditionally imperative, as tactically imperative discourse that can (among other things) pragmatically extend the historical inquiries that Foucault made. Indeed, this kind of feminist work on disability is most aptly characterized as a tactically and conditionally imperative feminist ontology of the problematization and naturalization of disability in philosophy, including in feminist philosophy.

Problematization of Disability in Feminist Philosophy and Feminist Bioethics

One might think that the ongoing problematization and naturalization of disability in feminist philosophy is puzzling given the concerted effort that feminist philosophers and theorists have expended to denaturalize and de-biologize other categories of identity and subjection, with feminist epistemologists and feminist philosophers of science articulating some of the most powerful arguments designed to denaturalize sex and gender. In fact, feminist philosophy of science coalesced in large part as a critical response to essentialist assumptions about sex and gender that have conditioned Euro-American thinking in general and Euro-American science and philosophy of science in particular; that is, feminist philosophy of science emerged primarily as a critical response to essentialist assumptions about sex and gender that have limited both the kinds of questions that mainstream scientists and philosophers of science regard as worthy of investigation and the kinds of responses

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[3] In *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*, I pointed out that Foucault's studies of abnormality, madness, and deviance (among other things) were not intended to provide normative responses to these phenomena, but rather were conceived as "problematizations" to investigate how the phenomena became both thinkable and thinkable as problems to which solutions should be sought. I noted, furthermore, that my inquiries in the book likewise did not offer an explicitly normative proposal or response to disability. In that context of my book, that is, I anticipated the claim that some feminist philosophers (for instance, Fraser 1989) make according to which Foucault's genealogical and other analyses offer no normative instruction, challenge, or repudiation. Foucault's remarks about conditionally imperative discourses and their tactical efficacy provide additional ways in which to address this sort of criticism of his work and of feminist uses of it.

to these questions that they regard as serious candidates for endorsement and take up in their own research and teaching.

Feminist scientists and feminist philosophers of science have, among other things, thrown into relief the biased nature of assumptions about reproductive processes (Martin 1991), have undermined the gendering of the brain (Fine 2011), and have subverted the very idea of two natural binary sexes (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Furthermore, some of the earliest work that feminist philosophers of science produced made associations between essentialist arguments about sex-gender and, for instance, degradation of the environment, subjugation of nonhuman animals, and colonial projects worldwide (Harding 1986, 1991). I want to point out, however, that although some feminist philosophers of science have not confined their inquiries solely to critique of the essentialist underpinnings of philosophical and scientific claims about sex and gender, critical questions and concerns about disability, settler colonialism, and race (among other urgent concerns) have nevertheless remained sidelined in feminist philosophy of science and feminist philosophy more generally.

Put directly, many feminist philosophers continue to implicitly construe gender as prior to, more fundamental than, and separable from disability and other apparatuses of subjecting power, even though they explicitly claim to endorse and uphold the political and theoretical value and practice of intersectionality. Many feminist philosophers continue to believe that insofar as "women" share so many experiences in virtue of their gender, an analytical focus on gender in isolation from, say, disability, race, class, and nationality constitutes a legitimate project. That gender remains predominant in feminist philosophy in this way is of course due in part to the continuing underrepresentation of certain groups of people in the profession. These institutional and professional exclusions notwithstanding, however, the omission of critical philosophical work on disability from feminist philosophy is in large part due to (what I call) ableist exceptionism[4] in philosophy— that is, due to the endurance in philosophy of the assumption that disability (unlike other categories of social identity and subjection)is a nonaccidental, biological human characteristic that certain people naturally embody or possess. By contrast, the conception of disability that I have engineered denaturalizes it, construing it as a

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[4] *Ableist exceptionism* is the term that I use to refer to the phenomenon whereby disability, because it is assumed to be a prediscursive, (i.e., prior to the influence of culture) natural, and politically neutral characteristic (difference, attribute, or property), is uniquely excluded from the production and application of certain values, beliefs, principles, and actions that circulate in political consciousness (Tremain 2017).

far-reaching and complicated matrix of power in which everyone is implicated and entangled and in which everyone occupies a position.

An especially disappointing example of the problematization and (re)naturalization of disability in feminist philosophy can be found in *Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal*, feminist bioethicist Heather Widdows's recent book on the ethics of feminine beauty standards. One of the central theses of the book is that norms with respect to beauty and appearance more generally are social constructs, never ethically or politically neutral, always value laden (Widdows 2018, 122, 131–137). Yet Widdows's brief discussion of disability in *Perfect Me* undercuts these claims and reinforces an individualized and medicalized conception of disability in feminist bioethics.

Widdows's remarks about disability span roughly one-and-a-half pages of her 341-page book. Indeed, the discussion of disability that appears on pages 150–151 is the first and only explicit mention of disability in *Perfect Me*, though uncritical endorsement of notions that rely upon an individualized and medicalized conception of disability—"health," "healthy," "healthy functioning," "disorder," "risk," "abnormal bodies," and "suffering"—peppers Widdows's analysis of beauty throughout the book. Most philosophers of disability will, furthermore, recognize the missed opportunities of this book to advance a politicized analysis of disability, especially, though not exclusively, in the chapter in which Widdows examines the social construction of notions of normality (121–137). None of the substantial body of work on the construction of normality and practices of normalization that I and other philosophers and theorists of disability have generated is mentioned or even referenced in this chapter, let alone seriously entertained (for instance, Tremain 2001, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2017; Hall 2016; Amundson 2000; Davis 1995). In short, Widdows's treatment of disability in *Perfect Me* is indicative of the structural gaslighting in which nondisabled feminist and other bioethicists participate with respect to critical philosophical work on disability in order to sustain their epistemic authority vis-à-vis disabled people.[5] That this aspect of Widdows's book—that is, that this absence from Widdows's book—has thus far gone unnoticed or at least unacknowledged in numerous philosophy journal reviews of the book is, in addition, an example of ableist exceptionism in philosophy and in feminist philosophy in particular, as well as a testament of the extent to which most philosophers (including feminist philosophers) disregard philosophy and theory of disability, especially the work of disabled philosophers of disability. Let me note, therefore, that the work on normality and normalization that philosophers and theorists of

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[5] For a fuller account of how the subfield of bioethics is an epistemology of domination with respect to disability, see my *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (Tremain 2017), especially the fifth chapter of the book.

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disability have produced is some of the best, if not the best, critical writing available on the topic.

Now, I surmise that Widdows's allegiance to analytic philosophy, and analytic bioethics especially, likely precluded from her discussion opportunities for a more critical feminist analysis of the relationships between beauty, disability, and normality. However, were Widdows to have drawn on (say) my work on disability, normality, and the incremental normalization that neoliberal bioethics enables— incremental normalization (especially coercive and concealed in bioethical discourses about medically assisted suicide and genetic technologies) that relies on the constitution of subjects who understand themselves as autonomous and free (Tremain 2017)—she might have recognized how my genealogies of impairment, normality, and normalization undermine the outdated claims of the once-dominant British social model of disability (henceforth, BSM) to which she ultimately appeals. As I have pointed out in a number of contexts and explain below, the assumptions of the BSM variously serve to re-naturalize and re-medicalize the apparatus of disability and, hence, run counter to some of the most analytically and politically perspicacious work currently done in philosophy of disability.

I have asserted that one of the most effective and philosophically tenable ways to make evident the historically contingent character of any seemingly natural and objective practice, state of affairs, identity, or value is to trace its genealogy (Tremain 2015, 2017, 2019). Indeed, I maintain that genealogy is the most effective way to trace the historical accidents and contingent circumstances from which normality or any other putatively prediscursive object has emerged. Foucault's genealogical work in particular and his novel claim that modern power is intentional and nonsubjective provide means with which feminist philosophers of disability can advance philosophically up-to-date critiques of the naturalization of disability that do not rely upon spurious appeals to ideology. In *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*, for instance, I argue, following Foucault, that the ideas of normality and impairment are artifactual mechanisms and effects of biopower, which is a complicated matrix of social power relations that, since the eighteenth century in the West, has facilitated population management and control, in the service of neoliberalism, through technologies of normalization.

If Widdows were to have consistently drawn on Foucault's insights, she would likely not have taken argumentative recourse to disputable claims about ideology. Appeals to ideology always presuppose the existence of a pristine realm of truth that ideology obfuscates and to which it prevents and withholds access. Hence, Widdows's claim that ideology plays a role in the production and naturalization of ideals of beauty (43) necessarily presupposes that there exists a realm of truth with respect to beauty that ideology about it distorts or obscures. Yet an argument, such as Widdows's, that presupposes an unfettered realm of truth

about beauty and closely associates the value of beauty with the value afforded to normality cannot, without contradiction, also assume that there is nothing objectively true about normality nor assume that the idea of normality is never value neutral. Indeed, although Widdows repeatedly asserts that normality is never neutral, always value laden, the brief remarks that she explicitly makes about disability belie these claims. She writes:

> Those who fall outside the normal range [of acceptable appearance] fall into two broad groups. The first are those who are disfigured by disability or accident or have physical features that are dramatically outside the normal range. No matter what those in these groups do they will never be able to attain normal. The second group are those who fall only a little outside the normal range, who could bring themselves within the normal range using products or procedures. For the first group there is no possibility of attaining normal, and therefore as appearance matters more, it is likely that discrimination against this group will increase. In addition, those who fail to measure up to appearance standards will become rarer, as appearance issues become regarded as disabilities. (Widdows 2018, 150)

This passage in Widdows's relatively short discussion of disability is both troubling and virtually self-contradictory, exemplifying the way that Widdows tacitly naturalizes disability throughout her book. For in order to distinguish between people who can never become normal and people who can become normal with some effort, Widdows installs a stable and unchanging conception of normality, despite her subsequent suggestion that the category of disability itself shifts in dimensions. For Widdows, no measure of social change could bring perceptions of the people in the first group within the normal range of appearance standards. On the contrary, Widdows implies that some people are *prediscursively* outside the normal range of appearance standards; that is, Widdows seems to think that some people are objectively, naturally, and ontologically, abnormal. In other words, normal and abnormal are not historically contingent, culturally specific, and value-laden social categories after all, at least not for everyone, at least not when they are applied to some people. With respect to disabled people at least, Widdows seems to think that normality and abnormality are transhistorical constants, prior to culture, and politically neutral.

To be sure, Widdows's final remarks in the cited passage suggest that she regards disability as a historically and culturally specific and contingent phenomenon; however, subsequent remarks that Widdows makes in the discussion indicate that her ideas about the ontology of disability are far less sophisticated than an account that characterizes disability in this way would be. To put it directly,

Widdows's remarks in this context rely upon a rather inaccurate representation of the BSM, an early model of disability whose distinction between impairment (construed as a biological characteristic) and disability (construed as a form of social disadvantage imposed upon impairment) naturalizes and re-medicalizes impairment and, hence, naturalizes and materializes the apparatus of disability. As I have argued in a number of contexts (for example, Tremain 2001, 2005, 2015, 2017), the distinction between impairment and disability which the BSM institutes is in fact a chimera that collapses upon scrutiny. Impairment is as socially constructed as disability; that is, disability is constructed all the way down, is a complex apparatus of power relations that produces impairment as its naturalized foundation in order to camouflage its own thoroughly political motivation. Philosophy of disability must thus be designed to identify and describe how this apparatus of power—that is, how this apparatus of disability—has operated within philosophy, including feminist philosophy, to bring (natural) impairment into being as that kind of thing.

Feminist Philosophy and the Apparatus of Disability

An astute feminist philosophy would denaturalize and de-biologize disability by arguing that disability is a historical artifact. As I have indicated, I recommend that feminist and other philosophers adopt Foucault's idea of an apparatus to understand and represent disability as a historically specific and dispersed system of force relations that produces and configures practices toward certain strategic and political ends. As an apparatus, disability is a historically contingent aggregate that comprises, constitutes, and is constituted by and through a complex and complicated set of discourses, institutions, technologies, identities, and practices that emerge from medical and scientific research, government policies and administrative decisions, academic initiatives, activism, art and literature, mainstream popular culture, and so on. Although some of the diverse elements of the apparatus of disability seem to have different and even conflicting aims, design strategies, and techniques of application, the elements of the apparatus are nevertheless co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing.

Indeed, the apparatus of disability is expansive and expanding, differentially subjecting people on the basis of constructed perceptions and interpretations of (among other things) bodily structure, appearance, style and pace of motility, size, mode of communication, emotional expression, mode of food intake, and cognitive character—all of which phenomena are produced and understood within a culturally and historically contingent frame and shaped by place of birth, gender, race, education, religion, years lived, and so on. Feminist and other philosophical analysis that understands disability as an apparatus treats these phenomena as the effects of contextually specific and performative relations of biopower rather than as transcultural and transhistorical objective and determined facts about humans. As

Foucault put it, "[Biopower is] what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (1978, 143). The term *biopower* refers to the vast convergence of these immanent strategies and techniques of population management and control from the eighteenth century onward. In short, biopower is the set of mechanisms through which the "life" of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power (Foucault 2007, 1).

A form of power that targets the "biological" features of the human being must take account of this creature's reproductive potential, that is, its sex. Sex has in fact been central to the economic and political problem of population that emerged with biopower and to which biopolitical strategies have responded; that is, with the emergence of population as an entity and organizing principle of governmentality came the problematization of sex, including surveillance practices and policies designed to manage birthrates, perverse sexuality, miscegenation, marital arrangements, relations between two supposedly natural sexes, and so on (Foucault 2003). As with the apparatus of sex, so too with the apparatus of disability: the emergence of population as an entity and organizing concept facilitated the production of a whole array of scientific, administrative, medical, and social techniques and strategies designed to calculate and control disability—that is, to calculate and control the ostensibly natural and unruly embodiment and experience of disability.

Apropos of this understanding of power as productive, rather than merely repressive, the conception of disability as an apparatus that I have engineered does not rely upon the assumption that impairment could be taken up as a politically neutral object of inquiry were it not for disabling practices of exclusion that the ideological requirements of power place upon it. This assumption is, however, fundamental to the BSM, which, as I have noted, construes impairment as a politically neutral human characteristic on which disability is imposed. With the conception of disability as an apparatus, no domain of impairment exists apart from relations of power; that is, there is no politically neutral nor value-neutral description or definition of impairment that exists apart from the relations of power that circumscribe impairment. Impairment can never be freed from power, nor, furthermore, can there be a phenomenology that supposedly articulates a prediscursive domain of impairment. On the terms of the feminist philosophy of disability that I have advanced, power relations are neither external to impairment and disability nor external to their nexus in the apparatus of disability, but rather are integral to them, constituting the knowledges and objects that these historical artifacts affect, as well as the artifacts themselves. My argument is, therefore, that philosophers who want to increase the heterogeneity of philosophy should assume that disability is an apparatus and use genealogy in order to destabilize the ways

that philosophy's ableist inequalities and exclusions continue to be naturalized, biologized, individualized, and materialized.

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